STUDENT DIVERSITY AND CURRICULUM IN THE BASIC PUBLIC SPEAKING COURSE: IMPLICATIONS FOR CREATING AN ADVANCED PUBLIC SPEAKING COURSE

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A

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This research study employs qualitative narrative analysis in order to develop an understanding of the lived experience of Graduate Teaching Assistants teaching the basic public speaking course at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Interviews with Graduate Teaching Assistants reveal three themes. First, it is important to recognize and address each student's abilities and experiences as unique. Second, based on individual students' abilities and experience, they should be allowed to select and define their own speaking situations and goals. Finally, students must have a comfortable and collaborative environment in which to experiment, practice, and respond to the choices made by their classmates. In a subsequent focus group interview, the co-researchers responded to a published course description for an advanced public speaking course. Co-researchers identified specific aspects of the advanced course description as addressing the emergent themes, providing implications for creating an advanced public speaking course at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to first acknowledge the students in my basic public speaking courses who have provided me with invaluable educational experiences, the likes of which I never could have anticipated. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my co-workers, especially those who agreed to participate in my research, and the Department of Communication: Bob, John, Jin, Pamela, and Leah.

INTRODUCTION

This research was undertaken in response to my own experiences teaching a basic public speaking course at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Through my interaction with students I have arguably learned more about communication than any one course could ever offer. I have found that facilitating a classroom of unique individuals is a considerable challenge. At the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the diverse student body magnifies the need to address student diversity in the classroom.

One particular element of diversity addressed in this research is that of students of Alaska Native heritage and/or students raised in rural communities in which Native cultures are prevalent. In many cases, these two groups are the same. However, to indicate that all students from villages are Native or that all Native students are from villages would be erroneous. For the purpose of this paper therefore, I will use a combined term, Native/rural, unless a co-researcher specifically referred to one or the other aspect.

CHAPTER I:

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Graduate Teaching Assistants in the basic public speaking course and the implications of those experiences for creating an advanced public speaking course at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. An examination of current research in communication pedagogy, specifically regarding how curriculum in the public speaking course affects students of diverse age, ethnicity, and gender was the foundation for inquiry.

Perkins and Blyler (1999) advocate a "narrative turn" in professional communication, aligning research and pedagogy with ethnographic approaches to social constructionist meaning making. Despite efforts to dismantle the objectivist/subjectivist dichotomy (Bavelas, 1995) there remains an apparent preference for the western tradition privileging logic and science (Perkins & Blyler, 1999). This preference for the objective fuels the linear sequential approach to public speaking which is present in much current communication pedagogy, often most strikingly in the basic public speaking course (Frobish, 2000).

Koester & Lustig (1991), in their discussion of communication curricula in the multicultural university, state that "communication curricula within the U.S." with their focus on "linear organization" and "prescriptive outlining pattern" teach skills and theory that are "culturally foreign to students with backgrounds other than that of the Anglo U.S. culture" and for whom "indirect, circular forms of organization are most consistent with their native language and cultural experiences" (p. 252). Scollon and Scollon (1981) further suggest that within American education there is a "widespread bias against narrative as a communicative medium" and that this bias "may constitute the basis for discrimination against some groups or individuals for whom narrative is a central component of communicative style" (p. 6). With growing diversity in college classrooms and the communication discipline's focus on diversity, it seems inappropriate to ask all students to conform to a single public speaking format deemed "correct" by the majority culture (Casmir, 1991; Nance & Foeman, 1993).

It has been long recognized by feminist scholars that the majority culture in America is not only white, but male (Wood, 1997). Whereas masculine speech tends to focus on "getting information, discovering facts, and suggesting solutions," feminine speech is more

likely to include "details, personal disclosures, anecdotes, and concrete reasoning" (Wood, 1997, p. 165). Not only are masculine voices privileged in linear models of informative public speech, but topics deemed "appropriate" and "inappropriate" tend to fall along traditional feminine/masculine lines as well (Campbell, 1991; Wood & Lenze, 1991; Vonnegut, 1992).

In addition to ethnic and gender diversity, modern college campuses include students from multiple generations. The typical freshman student entering college in the 21st century has grown up on a diet of television, video games, and Hollywood movies. Advances in modern technology change how we communicate and therefore, what students need to learn in college to prepare them for the workforce.

Haynes (1990) addresses public speaking pedagogy in light of what he calls "vid-oral" communication which is "increasingly responsive to and informed by electronically simulated experience" (p. 91). In response to current methods expressed in college speech textbooks which "stress the presentation of a predetermined (i.e. written) body of ideas ordered as though the audience would eventually be reading the results" (p. 92), Haynes proffers a "mode of presentation that, like the oral and unlike the written, strives for

intimacy" (p. 93). A vid-oral pedagogy requires, therefore, attention to subject, audience, style, and process. Located in the process category is "a new emphasis on the skills of narration" or "storytelling" that Haynes claims has been "diluted with writing-based imitation" (p. 99).

Frobish (2000) agrees that "the current state of speech pedagogy does not fully reflect modern theory and research" (p. 239). Frobish cites Kathleen Hall Jamieson's book, Eloquence in an Electronic Age, in his argument that the "new eloquence" which is characterized by "narrative, self-disclosive, and visual modes of persuasion" (p. 240) should be blended with the "old eloquence" whose rigid, linear, logic-based, informative structure is found in many public speaking courses today. The result according to Jamieson (1988) would unite the substance of the old with the style of the new allowing for the narrative self-disclosure popular in the media to include the content that it often lacks.

While younger students have been significantly influenced by media and technology, older, non-traditional students have markedly different experiences of life, communication, and education. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1998), adult enrollment in colleges and universities rose from less than one third to over 44% between 1970 and 1994. From a long history of research

in adult learning, several key traits have emerged as common within this population (Boulmetis, 1999; Caudron, 2000; Weinstein, 2000). These include a need for practical knowledge with immediate utility, desire for a climate that is collaborative and participatory, and recognition of the knowledge, experiences, and skills that each individual brings to the learning environment. These needs, in addition to the social aspects of dealing with younger students' perceptions of adults' communication competence, or lack thereof (Harwood, 1998), present special challenges for adult learners and those who teach them.

This literature suggests that the currently popular approaches to the basic public speaking course may be limited in their capacity to address student diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity, or age. Models have been created and suggestions given for a pedagogy more inclusive of women and minority students, and for modern students who have grown up in the new technological society. However, few are as detailed and widely applicable as Foss' (1992) curriculum for a "re-visioned" public speaking course. The course is designed to "integrate feminist and Afrocentric principles traditionally neglected in traditional approaches to public speaking" (p. 53). However, whether

purposeful or not, Foss' model benefits other cultural minorities, as well as traditional and non-traditional age groups.

Foss responds to typical speech assignments that "are trivial or unrelated to the kind of speaking students do or will do in their real lives" (p. 59). Instead students are asked to select from five different speaking goals: to articulate a perspective, to assert individuality, to maintain community, to discover knowledge or belief, or to resist. Once students have selected a speaking goal, they are given several choices regarding how they achieve that goal. In addition to the traditional organizational patterns such as chronological, topical, or problem-solution patterns, students learn how to use metaphor, narrative, complementary opposites, web, circle, and Rogerian patterns. The objectives for students in the course are:

> 1. To develop communication skills that facilitate the development of critical understanding, subjecting their ideas and experiences to others' scrutiny as a means to grasp, interpret, and evaluate information, issues, and the interests and values underlying them and 2. To develop speaking strategies and skills appropriate to a variety of goals, audiences and contexts. (p. 53)

Foss recognizes the value in traditional modes of public speaking, such as those currently taught at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, because "we must work in and respond to the corporate world" in which it is most often employed. However, she warns against excluding other approaches and therefore not "recognizing as legitimate, the diverse speaking goals, contexts, and approaches of those whose communicative practices and interests lie outside of [the corporate world]" (p. 53). Foss' course is designed to "integrate feminist and Afrocentric principles traditionally neglected in traditional approaches to public speaking" (p. 53). However, whether purposeful or not, Foss' model benefits other cultural minorities, as well as traditional and non-traditional age groups.

Like students at many other U.S. universities, students seeking a Bachelors degree at UAF must fulfill a core curriculum requirement in communication. They can choose between two courses, both of which focus on the standard, linear-sequential style of public speaking. Communication 141X is called Fundamentals of Oral Communication in a Public Context, in which students construct and present five different speeches: a diagnostic informative speech, a group speech or symposium, a visual aid speech, a persuasive speech, and a career speech based on an interview. Communication 131X,

Fundamentals of Oral Communication in Group Context, involves a significant amount of time devoted to working in groups. In this course students give only informative speeches. All speeches in either class are graded using an instrument created by the National Communication Association consisting of eight competencies that index success in achieving the sequential style common in American public speaking curricula. Each competency is scored on a five point scale. For the purposes of this study, I chose to focus primarily on the 141X course in order to exclude discussion of facilitation in small group communication.

UAF has its own unique student demographic. In the fall semester of 1999, 60% of the student body was over 25 years old and 44% was over 30; 34% of students were minority (non-white) and 18% identified themselves as Alaska Native or American Indian; 59% of the students were female (UA Information Systems, 2000). The University's mission is to "advance and disseminate knowledge through creative teaching, research, and public service with an emphasis on Alaska, the North and their diverse peoples" (UAF University Relations, 2000).

In light of the literature reviewed here, I am concerned that the current structure of the basic public speaking course at the University

of Alaska Fairbanks may not be addressing the needs of the diverse student body. The purpose of this study therefore, was to explore the experiences of University of Alaska Fairbanks Graduate Teaching Assistants dealing with student diversity in the public speaking course, and the implications of those experiences for creating an advanced public speaking course. This purpose is reflected in the two research questions addressed in this study:

RQ1: What is the experience of Graduate Teaching Assistants teaching the basic public speaking course to the diverse student body at the University of Alaska Fairbanks?

RQ2: What are the implications of these experiences for creating an advanced public speaking course?

CHAPTER TWO:

METHODOLOGY

According to Kvale (1996), the purpose of exploratory research is "the discovery of new dimensions of the subject matter" (p. 100). For the purposes of this research, it was important that the co-researchers be able to identify those dimensions of student diversity that they find pertinent to teaching public speaking. Due to the exploratory nature of this research, I chose a mixed methodology that allowed the co-researchers to explore their own experiences through conversational interviewing, followed later by a focus group setting in which the co-researchers could draw on each others' thoughts and ideas as well as respond to Foss' curriculum for an advanced public speaking course. Morgan (1997) recognizes that "focus groups and individual interviews can be complementary techniques" and that "the goal of combining research methods is to strengthen the total research project" (p. 23).

Co-researchers

The UAF Department of Communication is itself made up of diverse individuals. Of the ten Graduate Teaching Assistants currently in the program, eight are women and two are men, three are over 40 years of age, and 4 are citizens of foreign countries. When

selecting co-researchers for a study such as this, there are a number of considerations. Kvale (1996) suggests that the appropriate number of perspectives for qualitative interview research is 15 ± 10. However, because a focus group interview was also used, the number of co-researchers had to be selected with a focus group in mind. Krueger (1994) points out that in constructing focus groups, "smaller groups are preferable when the participants have a great deal to share about the topic or have had intense or lengthy experiences with the topic of discussion" (p. 79), as is the case with the Graduate Teaching Assistants.

Selection of participants is especially important when doing focus group interviews. I was careful to ensure that these particular co-researchers met Morgan's requirement that "the participants in [the] group both have something to say about the topic and feel comfortable saying it to each other" (p. 36). Krueger further suggests that when planning a focus group interview, it is "vital to identify the target group as precisely as possible" (p. 76).

With these suggestions in mind, and given my focus on pedagogy in COMM 141, I chose as co-researchers those Graduate Teaching Assistants who have taught a basic public speaking course for at least two semesters and are currently teaching at least one

section of the basic course. Four individuals fit these criteria, representing a cross-section of the demographics.

Interviews

According to Kvale (1996), the qualitative research interview "attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (p. 1). Through conversational interviews I elicited narratives about Graduate Teaching Assistants' lived experiences of teaching the public speaking course.

Interviews took place at the co-researchers' convenience in a neutral location of his or her choice. Each interview began with the co-researcher signing an informed consent document (Appendix A). I audio recorded the interviews using a non-intrusive recording device which was set on the table between us. As Kvale suggests, the research interview should be "an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest" (p. 125). Keeping this in mind, I began by inquiring about how long each co-researcher has been a Graduate Teaching Assistant and how many sections of the course he or she has taught. Next, the topic of student diversity at UAF was introduced and the co-researchers were

asked to share their experiences dealing with student diversity in the classroom.

Once the co-researcher began to share his or her narratives, I as the researcher practiced active listening which, as Kvale points out, "can be more important than the specific mastery of questioning techniques" (p. 132). Only when the co-researcher was clearly at the end of his or her narrative, would I use follow up or probing questions to clarify points or seek elaboration. By approaching the interview conversation in this way, I worked to achieve Lindlof's (1995) ideal of an interview which "takes on the form and feel of talk between peers: loose, informal, coequal, interactive, committed, open-ended, and empathic" (p. 164). The fact that the co-researchers are indeed my peers made this ideal more attainable.

Focus Group

Approximately seven to ten days after the individual interviews, the co-researchers were asked to meet as a group for a focus group interview. As a catalyst for discussion about how an advanced public speaking course might be structured, I asked each co-researcher to read Foss' (1992) article, entitled "Revisioning the Public Speaking Course." They were given a copy of the Foss article in advance so that they could arrive having already read it. They were then asked to

respond to themes that emerged from their narratives collected in the individual interviews as described by the researcher, as well as to the curriculum described in the Foss article.

According to Morgan (1997), when using combined qualitative methods such as individual interviews and focus group interviews, "the goal is to use each method so that it contributes something unique to the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon under study" (p. 3). The purpose of using the focus group method for this research was to allow the participants to respond to each other's contributions and as a result directly identify and collectively expand upon similarities and differences in the participants' opinions and experiences. Lindlof (1995) describes the benefits of a focus group as creating a setting "in which diverse perceptions, judgements, and experiences concerning particular topics can surface" (p. 174). These benefits are fostered by creating what Krueger (1994) calls "a permissive, non-threatening environment" (p. 6). Krueger elaborates on the nature of the focus group interview environment, describing it as follows:

> Focus groups produce qualitative data that provide insights into the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of participants. These results are solicited through open-ended questions and a

> procedure in which respondents are able to choose the manner in which they respond and also from observations of those respondents in a group discussion. The focus group presents a more natural environment than that of an individual interview because participants are influencing and influenced by others - just as they are in real life. (p. 19)

Morgan (1997) further recognizes that focus groups, with the researcher acting as moderator and focusing the discussion around a pre-selected topic means that, "the data lean toward the researcher-directed and publicly stated poles of the continuum" (p. 16). As the researcher, I have made a conscious decision to create a continuum between the current basic public speaking course on one end, and the course described in the Foss article on the other.

Narrative Analysis

"Analysis" according to Kvale (1996), "is not an isolated stage, but permeates an entire interview inquiry" (p. 205). Transforming oral speech to written text is an important element of analysis. Therefore, the recorded interviews were carefully transcribed from the cassette tapes in order to preserve as much of the original meaning as possible. The resulting data were analyzed thematically for an understanding of the lived experiences of Graduate Teaching

Assistants teaching the basic public speaking course. Thematic analysis of narrative data "leads to a new story to be told, a story developing the themes of the original interview" and serves to create a more "condensed and coherent story" from the "scattered stories of the separate interviewees" (Kvale, 1996, p. 199). For deeper interpretations, the researcher also derives meaning beyond the actual words to "work out structures and relations of meaning not immediately apparent in the text" (Kvale, 1996, p. 201). In doing so, I as the researcher must acknowledge my role as the research tool and recognize how my own experiences and beliefs may influence my interpretation of the narrative data.

Researcher

Teaching public speaking, in my experience, often involves convincing students that they have something to say. I believe that mastering the eight competencies is only as valuable as a student's willingness to use them. Explaining to students how public speaking can be a useful and empowering skill requires responding to each of them as individuals. This is a challenge that I have faced and discussed with my co-workers at great lengths during my tenure as a Graduate Teaching Assistant. These conversations have consistently

provided me with new insights and ideas about my role as a public speaking instructor.

As an undergraduate, the section of Communication 141 in which I was enrolled was primarily made up of non-traditional students. I remember more clearly the things I learned from their speeches, based on their abundant life experiences, than I remember what I learned from the instructor. This experience has influenced me in fostering a classroom environment in which the students have ample opportunity to learn from one another.

I continually evaluate my teaching strategy and create new activities and approaches to teaching public speaking. I have been vocal about raising questions to the department and suggesting changes to the basic course. I maintain that as a Graduate Teaching Assistant, teaching the basic course is not simply a task I perform in exchange for my education, it is an integral part of my education. I can say with some certainty that I have learned, from interacting with my students, as much as, if not more than they have learned from me. My interest in diversity is simply a product of these interactions.

I have found that as I have gained experience, I realize the value of being able to adapt the curriculum to the needs of my students. This is likely what attracted me to the Foss article, as I see it as

having more potential to adapting to a wider variety of student needs and experiences. Given my conversations with fellow Graduate Teaching Assistants and faculty regarding curriculum and pedagogy, I anticipated that my co-workers would be able to offer valuable insights into how public speaking is currently taught on this campus and how it might be taught in the future. My motivation in undertaking this research was to take advantage of what my co-workers and I have learned through our teaching experiences and make it available to those with an interest in expanding the program.

CHAPTER THREE:

INTERVIEWS

Kvale (1996) provides a metaphor for the role of the interviewer in qualitative interview research. He describes the interviewer as a traveler who "wanders through the landscape and enters into conversations with the people encountered" (p. 4). After collecting stories, the traveler then has his or her own tale to tell upon returning home. The researcher, therefore, has the job of deciding what aspects of the stories are most relevant to his or her particular interests.

As a fourth semester Graduate Teaching Assistant, I too have dealt with student diversity in the public speaking classroom. I have found, like the co-researchers, that the unique skills and experiences of students along with the challenges of teaching public speaking result in endless opportunities to creatively facilitate learning. We have each met this challenge in our own individual way. By learning more about how each of us has addressed the issues of student diversity in the classroom, we can create new opportunities for students to advance their public speaking skills.

Alice

The first co-researcher, Alice, is teaching the basic public speaking course for the first time, although she has taught several

sections of the alternative course in the past two semesters. After Alice read and signed the informed consent form and the recording device was turned on, I brought up the subject of the unique student demographics on the UAF campus. I asked Alice to share her experiences with me of teaching public speaking to a diverse student body.

Due to the fact that Alice teaches at the Tanana Valley Campus, a separate campus in the downtown business district of Fairbanks, she noted significant differences between the younger students who are more visible on the main campus and the older or non-traditional students who are more prevalent at the downtown campus. She has noticed that the older students, many of whom have started their careers and held jobs for a number of years, in addition to having families, "tend to be more serious students" than the younger students she encountered during previous semesters of teaching. On the other hand, she also noted that these individuals appear more "set in their ways" because they already have preconceived notions about what a good speech looks and sounds like.

Alice also identified challenges regarding Native or rural students. She told me that the rural/non-rural differences are much more pronounced than the Native/non-Native differences, "because

[she has] white people who come from rural communities who are not assertive speakers, who are very uncomfortable getting up and speaking in public," a trait often attributed to Alaska Natives. Although she pointed out that there are exceptions to every rule, she finds that even if the rural students are very good at speech organization, their public delivery tends to be lacking. Alice attributes this in part to a lack of confidence. When asked how she handles such situations as an instructor, Alice responded that although she doesn't address these issues in class, she does try to "explain [her] expectations a little more" to those students for whom "[public speaking] isn't an innate skill."

Alice sees another category of students struggle simply because "they don't want it, it's not something they want to do." Despite her attempts to "try to build a supportive environment" in the classroom, Alice sees the discomfort of speaking in public as a major obstacle to student success. This discomfort, Alice believes, sometimes leads her students to make excuses for not being able to complete the speaking assignments.

Alice works hard to overcome situations such as these by making sure that the classroom is a comfortable setting that is conducive to collaboration. Both positive feedback as well as

feedback regarding performance that needs to be improved are given publicly during class. Alice has encouraged this dialogue because she wants them to "not think of it as this serious private thing," but instead "to look at it like [they] are all evaluating each other...and it's a collaborative thing." Alice finds this a very effective approach and is particularly pleased when students verbally encourage a classmate who has "stop[ped] because they're freaking out in the middle of [their speech]." Alice explained this technique further saying, "if I tell them...it just doesn't weigh as much" whereas "if they have to hear that and think their peers are saying that, I think it makes sense."

We then moved on to the topic of how students respond to specific assignments in the course. Alice immediately identified one particular assignment as problematic for her non-traditional students. The career speech is an assignment in which students are asked to interview an individual about a career in which they are interested. Because a number of her students are already in careers, they found the assignment to lack utility. Therefore, Alice "absolutely had to tailor that assignment to them" but still found that they didn't take the assignment seriously.

Another assignment that creates consternation is the group speech. Alice identifies two primary difficulties with this assignment

for her adult students at the Tanana Valley Campus. She explained that when she made the group speech assignment, there had been "a slight uprising" because "most of them work, most of them have families" and therefore found it quite difficult to meet with a group outside of class time. In addition, Alice pointed out that several of the students at the downtown center are working toward two-year Associate degrees in order to become a computer technologist or administrative assistant, careers that are "usually not real collaborative." Alice concluded the interview by saying, "I think that if [the students] could choose an assignment... something that they could...actually use, I think that would almost be better."

Buddy

The second co-researcher, Buddy, has been teaching for four semesters and has taught two sections of the 141X course in that time. Buddy, like Alice, began the interview by stating that he doesn't find the Native/non-Native distinction useful. Instead, it is the rural/urban background that seems to be the important trait that influences student performance in this course. Those students who were raised in the villages, in more traditional Native cultures, Buddy finds, have more difficulty being expressive and/or animated while speaking. Recalling one student in particular, Buddy said that the

requirement that a speaker be expressive "was not at all natural to him, in fact, it was pretty foreign."

In addition to struggling with the nonverbal aspect of public speaking, Buddy reported that "[rural students'] speaking style is different." This impression has been reinforced by research he's done on the subject of Native communication styles. Buddy has also witnessed a Native student speaker who, before ever addressing his topic,

> talked about 15 or 20 minutes about where he was from, who his family was, where his mother was from, where his father was from, who in the family had been chiefs, where their family lived 100 years ago, why they moved down river to another village...

Buddy said that the experience of this event is consistent with what he says he has learned from other Native students in the classroom.

Buddy did identify some changes that might be helpful in facilitating instruction for Native/rural students. He finds that "cultural sensitivity isn't really embedded in the course." Buddy thinks that addressing some of the issues related to diversity in the classroom and how to address those issues would be a valuable addition to the Graduate Teaching Assistant training process. Buddy

thinks that by placing more emphasis on training instructors to facilitate the course, students from different cultures could "bridge that gap a little bit more gently" and alleviate some of the difficulties he has dealt with in teaching.

Finally, Buddy stated that despite the challenges of dealing with student diversity, he finds that "overwhelmingly, the difficulty in teaching is the grading procedure." He perceives that the current National Communication Association competencies used along with the five point grading scale is overly critical and tends to discourage students quickly. Even for students from the majority culture, Buddy recognizes public speaking as "commonly acknowledged to be one of the things people are most fearful of" and finds that the current grading system "beat[s] them up pretty good right out of the gate."

Charlotte

The third co-researcher has the most experience teaching of the four individuals interviewed. She has been a Graduate Teaching Assistant for five semesters and at the time of the interview was teaching her fifth and sixth sections of the 141X course. Charlotte is very aware of the demographics of her students, not only by observation, but she surveys them every semester in order to provide them with a description for audience analysis.

She has found that many of her students come from families with one Native parent and one non-Native parent and has encountered several students who refuse to identify themselves with any particular ethnic group. Once again, Charlotte stated that it isn't their ethnicity that affects their speaking ability as much as whether they have a rural educational background as compared to an urban educational system. From Charlotte's standpoint, the primary difficulty is that many of the rural students have been taught that reading is an acceptable way to make a public presentation, whereas in the 141X basic course, extemporaneous speaking is taught and therefore reading is unacceptable.

Charlotte has similar difficulties with other groups of students who come to her class having already learned a particular style of public speaking and find it difficult or unnecessary to learn a new approach. One group of students who often fit this description are older or non-traditional students, many of whom have some experience speaking in public and feel that they have been successful at doing so. Therefore, they feel no need to conform to the specific style of speaking required in the 141X basic course. "In that regard," Charlotte says, "they're a little bit more difficult to work with, to change their mind about something."

Charlotte is also concerned about the negative effects of these disgruntled students on the rest of the class, citing a situation in which a non-traditional student who was resisting the course material made an unsolicited announcement to the class that "you can pass with a D." Charlotte shared several stories like this one about non-traditional students who refused to conform to the style of speaking being taught and how their actions in the classroom made it more difficult for her to address the needs of other students in the class.

When Charlotte was asked how she dealt with these situations as an instructor, she told me some specific things she does to help students adapt the course materials to their own experiences. For example, Charlotte addresses Native traditions and oral traditions in class. During meetings with individual students, Charlotte often suggests to rural students that they "incorporate [storytelling] into their speeches" as support material instead of "statistics or just factual stuff" with the idea that it might "be more helpful for them to be able to extemporize." Although many students take this advice and find it somewhat helpful, it only addresses one aspect of the problem.

As with Alice and Buddy, Charlotte concluded her interview with a recommendation for improving the basic course. Charlotte

believes that more could be done to encourage the Graduate Teaching Assistants to "set up a rapport with the students." She is not comfortable with the current approach to the course, which she describes as "almost like they just [tell the Graduate Teaching Assistants], 'just herd them in, just treat them like numbers. If they don't comply, then slap them with a C or a D.'"

Darla

Darla, the fourth co-researcher has been a Graduate Teaching Assistant for four semesters and has taught 141X for half of that time. Darla's interview was unique in that she had fewer specific examples of difficult situations and spent more time talking about how she has changed her own approach to the course for the purpose of addressing different student needs. Darla has also been doing research on service learning and other alternative approaches to the current basic course.

Darla began the interview by explaining her interest in the "practical nature" of the course. She finds that the non-traditional students have an easier time both identifying situations in which they might be asked to speak in public and the importance of having the appropriate skills with which to do so. Darla has chosen to address the concept of practicality on the first day of class, asking each

student to identify a situation in which they might use public speaking skills. Whereas younger students tend to identify academic situations, older students are more likely to "bring in life examples." She recalls being excited when, for the first time, a few students explained that "I am going to need to use public speaking skills when I try and change things in my community." This is the kind of realization that Darla wants to facilitate in her class, that public speaking is a pragmatic skill that can be useful in a variety of situations.

Another difference that Darla finds between older and younger students is that younger students tend to be more concerned with their grades whereas older students often have a sincere desire to improve their public speaking skills. Although she recognizes this as a generalization with a number of exceptions, she "can't imagine" a freshman student having the desire to learn and putting forth the effort that some of her older students have displayed. As a result, many of the younger students choose topics that are less "thoughtful" and "relevant" than the older students. Darla considers this a matter of experience and lack of ability to foresee situations in which one might actually be speaking in public. She struggles with her decision to allow each student to choose his or her own topic. On one hand

she doesn't want to limit those students who "do have an interest in something, who do want to learn how to speak about a particular subject." On the other hand, she wants to ensure that each student chooses a topic that requires that they "have to go through a process of actually thinking carefully about a topic, about doing research, about citing sources, about trying to...construct an argument with sources."

Darla is also concerned about comments she gets from her students regarding the type of speaking taught in the class which she describes as "extemporaneous, informative, linear sequential, three main points, preview, review." She finds that it is the Native students who are the most outspoken against this style of speaking. For some, it simply doesn't provide the "room to move" that they desire, but for others the problem is more serious. One student in particular commented on a number of occasions that he felt the textbook to be racist and Darla suggested that "if he wasn't talking to me face to face, he would say that the class itself was racist." Darla laments that she didn't do a better job of facilitating discussion about different types of speaking and why the students are being taught only one specific way. She perceives that students with concerns like these won't have "gotten much from the course because of [those issues]."

As a result of student concerns, Darla has learned to "really load up heavy on explanation early on in the course." This semester she went further, showing the class three public speeches in three very different styles. She then asked her students to discuss "which one they thought was most effective, why, what the strengths they saw in the speech were." This allowed her to facilitate a discussion about different styles of speaking and why one might choose one over another in different situations.

The difficulty Darla faces in trying to make the course practical for her students includes teaching true audience analysis, which she believes is "one of the most essential parts of public speaking." Although making one's speech appropriate and relevant to the audience is included in the eight competencies upon which students are graded, Darla finds that this aspect of public speaking is lost in the course. Because her students are speaking to the same audience of their classmates each time, most of whom are assumed to be quite similar to themselves, students don't spend much time or effort on analysis. The students tend to rely on the fact that they are all students at the same University to make their topics relevant. Darla thinks that it is essential to find ways to "make audience more *there* or more essential."

As Darla has adapted her teaching to address student needs, she has noticed a change from students who used to leave class feeling "beat down...by the rigidness of it, by the lack of ability to experiment" to students who tell her "this is my favorite class" or "I really liked what I learned here."

Focus Group

Almost two weeks after the individual interviews, the co-researchers were asked to assemble for a focus group interview. Each co-researcher was given a copy of the Foss article and asked to read it before the interview. As the researcher, I reviewed the purpose of the research and explained the goals of focus group interaction. I then briefly related the themes identified from the individual interviews and asked for any comments. In addition, I asked for comments regarding the Foss article and whether or not there were aspects of Foss' course description that the co-researchers perceived might address some of the issues raised in the individual interviews.

Charlotte began the discussion by saying that she was impressed by the thoughtfulness of Foss' course description. Charlotte was especially interested in the speaking goal that Foss refers to as "to articulate a perspective." She compared this concept to that of the persuasive speech which is currently part of the 141X

basic course at UAF. She explained that by changing the assignment from persuasion to articulating a perspective, the assignment wouldn't "just center on typical manipulation through persuasion" and students would have the opportunity to choose "other avenues of persuading." Alice agreed with Charlotte, adding that the word persuasion "implies a certain deception."

Darla, repeating a concern articulated in her individual interview, expressed frustration that persuasion as it is currently used in the 141X course relies entirely on the speaker as persuader while the audience members "are just being persuaded." She contrasted this with the goal of articulating a perspective which she described as "much more about constructing an argument that gives [the] audience the opportunity to make a decision."

This led to a discussion regarding dialogue in public speaking as preferable to monologue. Alice then explained how she promotes dialogue in her class. As she had explained in her individual interview, after her students present a speech, she has their classmates "publicly give comments about each other's [presentation]." She then has students write down their responses to each presentation and uses those responses to reinforce her grading process. Alice added that the Foss article addresses her concern that

"the speeches we ask [students] to give, don't apply to their real lives," referring to the career speech she discussed in her individual interview, which she says is irrelevant for her non-traditional student population. Charlotte agreed that the career speech assignment is "designed for younger students."

Buddy related that he also finds it difficult to get his students to give presentations that "relate to their real lives." He finds that the speaking style taught in the basic course isn't appropriate for most situations students are likely to find themselves in, such as "advocating to the PTA or talking to the Board of Directors, or organizing the people you work with at Pizza Hut to stand up against management." Buddy perceives that Foss' course would make it easier for students to create speeches for "real life" situations.

Darla added that she thinks it is the opportunity for students to define their own audience in the Foss course that allows for a more realistic situation for the speakers. She reiterated her difficulty in trying to get her students to attend to the audience when for every speech, "it's still the same kids in the classroom being bored." Buddy admitted that he does allow his students to define their own audience. He made this decision in response to students who have specific audiences in mind which are significantly different than the students

in the class. He cited an example of a student who teaches classes on flower-arrangement and is taking the course because "she wants to refine [her public speaking skills]." As a result, Buddy allowed her to define her audience as "a class of people participating in a workshop on floral arrangements."

Buddy also expressed appreciation for Foss' rationale for her revisioned public speaking course. He quoted from Foss' article that the typical basic course is only "designed to enable students to achieve success in the corporate world," indicating that he agrees with Foss that there are other valuable purposes for public speaking skills that aren't being addressed in the basic course. Alice reiterated that the basic course "doesn't allow for a diverse speaking style." Charlotte pointed out that many of the Native students have a communication style that is "circular and reflexive." She added that although there are some things, such as using stories as evidence in their presentations, that may help Native students adjust to the Western style of speech being taught, allowing them to choose a different structure altogether "would even be greater." Buddy added that he has found that some of his Native students "just simply can't...follow the structure that we try to impose on them."

Assertiveness was also identified as an issue of concern when teaching Native students. Alice claims that she is not an assertive speaker but still feels that she is able to practice successful public speaking. Buddy is discouraged by the attitude he thinks the department takes toward the issue. He perceives that he is being asked to tell his students, "if you're not assertive, and if you're not loud," then you will not succeed, so "learn it or drop out."

Although Alice recognizes that there are "very patriarchal portions of society" where assertiveness is required, she is uncomfortable perpetuating such structures in class. Charlotte expressed discouragement regarding the failure of the current course to address speaking styles of "marginalized people." Buddy responded, reminding us that traditionally "marginalized people" are now the majority, highlighting the need to address student diversity.

Charlotte claims that the result of the basic course's failure to address the needs of the diverse students only serves to "set them up to fail." She contrasts this with a course that would allow students to speak about things that are important to them in ways that are more natural to them, allowing them to celebrate their heritage, rather than "feeling diminished" by their inability to conform to the prescribed structure. She described the difficulty with "trying to impose linear

sequential thinking and structure...on things that just defy that organizational structure."

At this point the discussion turned back to the importance of attending to audience. In addition to defining audience, Charlotte pointed out that it is also important to define the physical setting of the room in which one is presenting. For example she asked, "are we presenting to a Board of Directors? Are we sitting around a boardroom?" Charlotte related a story to illustrate her point. She explained that she had been asked to go to Fort Yukon, an Athabaskan village on the Yukon River, to teach a basic public speaking course. The students in her class were planning to "present in front of the [state] legislature...on behalf of Native corporations, and they wanted to know how to address the legislators." This situation required attention not only to speaking style, but also to the specific context in which the speech would be presented.

In response, Darla suggested that other departments could benefit from an advanced public speaking course, specifically the Rural Development Department, which often deals with situations such as the one Charlotte described. She added that by creating a course that addresses a variety of student needs, the Communication Department could serve students from a number of disciplines.

Buddy reinforced this notion, pointing out that the Department justifies its basic courses based on a study by Winsor, Curtis, and Stephens (1997), which indicates that public speaking skills are a "major factor deemed important in aiding graduating college students in obtaining employment" (p. 173). Based on that research, Buddy suggests, "we should have more than one entry level...class." He added that "if this is the most important thing, and that's what we're telling all of these students, well then...why aren't we doing it in graduate school?"

Alice responded by explaining that she perceives that the majority of her non-traditional students already recognize the importance of having public speaking skills. It is the younger students who fail to see the utility of public speaking skills and tend to focus on their discomfort with speaking in public. Charlotte added that most people "have a hard time" speaking in public and that the course described by Foss "could help with that because it might make a more comfortable environment."

CHAPTER FOUR:

ANALYSIS

Narrative analysis, according to Kvale (1996), is a "reconstruction of the many tales told by the different subjects into a richer, more condensed and coherent story than the scattered stories of the separate interviewees" (p. 199). Analysis, however, is not confined to the final stage of the research that bears its name. Analysis in Narrative human science permeates the entire research process and rests on the primacy of the research question. This analysis seeks to move carefully to a single narrative, enriched by the differences in the individual stories to illuminate the two research questions set forth in the first chapter, which are:

RQ1: What is the experience of Graduate Teaching Assistants teaching the basic public speaking course to the diverse student body at the University of Alaska Fairbanks?

RQ2: What are the implications of these experiences for creating an advanced public speaking course?

I found that the experiences of the co-researchers, as related through their narratives, were consistent with my own struggles with the challenges of teaching a particular mode of public speaking to students with diverse skills and experiences. However, in their seven

years of combined experience, each co-researcher has found unique ways with which to address these issues. These approaches, invented by necessity, offer pertinent insight into how an advanced public speaking course might be structured to address a variety of student needs, abilities, learning styles, communication styles, and skills.

In addition, I saw in the lived experiences of the co-researchers a characteristic I see as a unique aspect of teaching basic communication courses. This characteristic, described by Lederman (1992), lies in the paradox that students entering a basic communication course bring with them a lifetime of experience with the process of communication, but little if any insight into that process. What the students do know is based on their own personal experience and is, therefore, specific to the individual and his or her situation and culture.

Due to the fact that students at the University of Alaska Fairbanks have such a wide diversity of situations and cultures, the gap between the students' experience with communication and the understanding of it is sometimes pronounced. The two groups identified by the co-researchers as having the most trouble bridging this gap are Native/rural students and older, non-traditional

students. Each of the co-researchers offered narratives regarding difficulties they perceive students from these groups having with the core course. After explaining the difficulty, each then described what they have done to address the situation.

Co-Researcher Interviews

Native/rural students were reported to be "uncomfortable," "soft spoken and...bashful." These students tend to "talk slow...monotone" and are "not very expressive." The Graduate Teaching Assistants recognize that these difficulties are likely a result of the fact that "their speaking style is different." Examples such as the tendency to describe one's family lineage at the beginning of a presentation, "talking in circles," and having been taught that "public speaking is reading" describe some of the traits identified as common to rural students' communication styles.

I interpret these experiences as consistent with some of the differences Scollon and Scollon (1981) have identified between traditional Athabaskan Indians and mainstream American English speakers. Scollon and Scollon state that contrary to American English speakers who "feel that the main way to get to know the point of view of people is through conversation with them," traditional Athabaskans avoid conversation "except when the point of view of all

participants is well known" (p. 15). In addition, individuals raised in an Athabaskan tradition have their own beliefs about teacher/student relationships. Whereas American English speakers expect students to demonstrate their knowledge to teachers while teachers observe and respond when necessary, Athabaskans believe that the teacher's role is to display abilities and qualities for the student to learn. Each of these differences, or a combination of them, may contribute to the co-researchers' observations of Native/rural students as quiet and withdrawn. Differences such as these may also explain why Native/rural students are perceived as lacking expression.

Scollon and Scollon also identify differences between English language usage for American English speakers and for traditional Athabaskans who speak English in ways influenced by Athabaskan language and culture. In American English, one "can tell how to interpret the main message by paying attention to the stress, intonation, or tone of voice" of the speaker. However, in the Athabaskan language, emphasis is often expressed through "suffixes or words at the beginning or the end of a phrase that tell you how to interpret the whole phrase" (p. 29). This language structure often gets transferred into an individual's English usage and therefore gives the impression of lacking expression in his or her vocal presentation.

Because Scollon and Scollon worked with individuals raised in a more traditional Athabaskan setting, the extent to which these factors are present for contemporary Native students is not clear. Nevertheless these factors serve as important sensitizing concepts.

In response to situations in which differences in communication styles cause confusion or conflict, the Graduate Teaching Assistants have made some adjustments in their approaches to teaching the course material. Alice explained that she tries "to explain [her] expectations a little more" and "to elaborate on [feedback] more" than she does for those students for whom the mainstream principles of public speaking are "culturally...instilled." Alice finds it necessary to give more "help...and support" to her rural students in order to help them succeed in the course.

Charlotte responds to her rural students in similar ways. She "spend[s] time one-to-one with all [her] students that struggle." Charlotte addresses the differences in communication styles and encourages her students to incorporate their own style by using stories, more common in Native cultures, to support the main points in their speeches, rather than statistics and straight facts. Buddy also makes a point of addressing student concerns and issues of difference. He has a strong belief that the style of speaking being

taught is useful and works hard to articulate why it will be important to his students, both Native and non-Native, in the future.

Darla also perceives communication and explanation as the remedy to a number of student concerns. She, in part, blames herself for a student who left the class with the impression that the class was racist and has learned to "load up heavy on explanation early in the course." She acknowledges that there are a variety of ways to speak in public and that a good speaker will make a number of conscious decisions about public speaking when preparing a presentation. She also tries to explain why the particular type of speaking being taught was originally chosen as the most appropriate for the course.

The unifying theme in these data is identifying student experiences and assumptions and relating them to the course material and type of public speaking being taught. In other words, using the students' experiences as the raw materials for helping them understand the pragmatic application of the course material, appears to be the primary tool the co-researchers rely on to facilitate learning in the classroom. The co-researchers use this tool to provide a foundation on which to build students' understanding of the structure and purpose of the course. Along these lines, there were suggestions from some of the co-researchers that more attention could be paid to

preparing Graduate Teaching Assistants to deal with these issues before they approach the basic course. The co-researcher narratives indicate that addressing students' own public speaking experiences and clearly explaining how different types of speaking are appropriate for different situations may be an effective approach to addressing student diversity. They have found that making the subject matter relevant to the student by acknowledging each student's experiences and abilities when they enter the class has been an important element in dealing with Native/rural students.

The other student population that often poses a challenge to Graduate Teaching Assistants may be described as older or non-traditional students. As stated earlier, 60% of the student population at the University of Alaska Fairbanks is over 25 years of age and 44% is over 30. This is a stark contrast to what is generally considered the "normal" age for college students; i.e. between eighteen and twenty-one. Each of the co-researchers reported distinct differences between the ways in which older students and younger students approach the course.

According to the co-researcher narratives, older students can take on a number of different roles in the classroom. These roles are often closely related to the work that these individuals do outside the

college setting. Several stories were told about women who played nurturing roles, or chose speech topics related to childcare. Others, who had jobs in addition to attending classes, had difficulty adjusting to the speaking style if they felt it was inappropriate for their particular position. Several non-traditional students came to the course with some public speaking experience. Those who had a high opinion of their own skills were hard to convince that learning new skills might be useful to them. Those older students who did have a desire to learn the skills, however, were identified as paying more attention, being more readily able to identify useful topics for real life situations, and learning more quickly than their younger classmates.

I interpret these experiences as consistent with Knowles (1998) who states that "adults are motivated to learn to the extent that they perceive that learning will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in their life situations" (p. 67). Knowles further states that adult learners have a desire for previous experience to be acknowledged and appreciated. He points out that "by virtue of simply having lived longer, [adult students] have accumulated more experience" (p. 66). Although these experiences may indeed enrich the learning experience for all students (and even the instructor as Buddy suggested), the non-traditional student also

poses challenges. Knowles explains, "as we accumulate experience, we tend to develop mental habits, biases, and presuppositions" (p. 66). He suggests that in response, educators should "try to discover ways to help adults examine their habits and biases and open their minds to new approaches" (p. 66). The co-researchers who reported success with adult students use class discussion and collaborative teaching styles to allow their adult students to utilize and share their experiences with their classmates.

I have found in my own experience that because adult students tend to be more involved in activities outside of school regarding their career, family, and community, it is important that they are able to choose topics and speaking styles that they find personally relevant to a variety of situations. The co-researchers have also learned to be more flexible with speech topics, allowing students to select topics and define audiences that reflect their experiences and speaking goals outside of the classroom. Giving students this type of control over their assignments contributes to the goal of acknowledging diversity and aids the students in recognizing the pragmatic nature of the course material.

From the individual interviews, it was apparent that Graduate Teaching Assistants have found that in order to foster learning for

these groups of students, it is important to respect and encourage diverse communication styles. I identified three specific themes in the individual co-researcher narratives regarding their own conclusions about how to best accomplish this objective. First, it is important to recognize and address each student's abilities and experiences. By identifying how students understand communication when they enter the classroom, the instructor can tailor their instruction to the specific skills and experiences of the individual students in the course. Second, based on individual students' abilities and experiences, they should be allowed to select and define their own speaking situations and goals. Allowing students to hone their skills in situations that reflect real life experiences allows them to make informed and appropriate decisions about topic, organization, and delivery. Finally, students must have a comfortable and collaborative environment in which to experiment with topic, organization, and delivery and respond to the decisions made by their classmates.

Focus Group Interview

The focus group stage of this research study allowed the co-researchers to interact with one another and respond to the Foss article. The aspects of Foss' course that appealed to the co-researchers as useful in addressing issues of diversity in public

speaking included first, her recognition that a corporate setting is not the only setting in which public speaking skills are required. Foss recognizes that "we must work and respond to the corporate world," but she warns that

> to privilege the kind of speaking valued in such a world at the exclusion of others means, however, that public speaking instructors are not teaching, or even recognizing as legitimate, the diverse speaking goals, contexts, and approaches of those whose communicative practices and interests lie outside of it. (p. 53)

Her statement reflects the opinions of the experienced Graduate Teaching Assistants in that, although they recognize the benefits of the type of speaking being taught in the basic course, they also recognize that the diversity of student skills and experiences requires acknowledging diverse speaking situations.

Therefore the co-researchers believe in the value of providing the students with a variety of tools with which to build a speech. This concept is reflected in one of the objectives of the course described by Foss. Developing "speaking strategies and skills appropriate to a variety of goals, audiences, and contexts," drives the entire course structure and reflects the preference of the co-researchers for allowing

students to make choices about their own topics and organizational patterns.

Allowing students to select their own speaking goals and organizational patterns to reflect real life situations ensures that individual needs are being met. Of the five speaking goals and five patterns identified by Foss, the Graduate Teaching Assistants' discussion focused on two of each as particularly important in allowing students to make appropriate and relevant decisions about preparing and presenting a public speech.

Of the five speaking goals set forth by Foss, articulating a perspective and asserting individuality were specifically identified as appropriate for the students at UAF. Articulating a perspective was seen by the co-researchers as a favorable alternative to the more common goal of persuasion. Persuasion was seen by the co-researchers to imply "deception," "manipulation," and "monologic communication" in which the speaker is the actor and the audience simply a benign receptor. Articulating a perspective, as Foss describes it, is "not designed to control the perceptions, actions, and thoughts of the audience in order to secure its submission to the speaker's viewpoint or perspective" (p. 55). Articulating a perspective instead aims "to enhance [the speaker's] critical understanding and

that of others" (p. 55). Rather than focusing on emotional appeals and other tools of persuasion, articulating a perspective requires a thorough understanding of all positions and dimensions of the issue.

Asserting individuality was the second speaking goal identified by the Graduate Teaching Assistants as addressing diversity. The co-researchers described how the rigid structure enforced in the basic course sometimes serve to diminish individuality, especially in those students whose communication style is markedly different from the American English norm. On the contrary, asserting individuality involves "seek[ing] self-identification, projection of [speakers'] personalities, assertion of the self, or identity management to facilitate others' understanding of [one's] perspective" (p. 55). Allowing students to address their differences in this way was identified by the co-researchers as being a valuable tool in recognizing and addressing diversity.

Students in Foss' course are also allowed to select from five organizational patterns to accomplish their speaking goals. Two of the patterns described were recognized as beneficial alternatives to the western, linear-sequential organizational style taught in the basic course. Both Foss' narrative and circular patterns are believed by the Graduate Teaching Assistants to be valuable options, especially for

Native/rural students whose speaking styles are influenced by Native oral traditions. In addition to allowing students to choose from a variety of speaking goals and organizational styles in order to make sound decisions for a variety of situations, the objectives of Foss' course also include the concept of "subjecting [students'] ideas and experiences to others' scrutiny" (p. 55). I see this aspect of the course as consistent with the co-researchers current teaching practices.

Creating a comfortable and constructive atmosphere in which to practice public speaking skills has been a primary component in the co-researchers' own approaches to teaching public speaking. The atmosphere of the classroom, according to the experiences of the co-researchers, can have a significant effect on the performance of individual students. In addition, recognizing students' ability to be a receptive audience and give critical feedback to their classmates shows respect for their own experiences of and ideas about communication.

Conclusion

The lived experiences of Graduate Teaching Assistants offer important insights for creating an advanced public speaking course at this university. These experiences suggest that student diversity plays an important role in teaching and learning public speaking

skills. Native/rural students and non-traditional students were identified as having distinct communication styles and experiences. In response to the needs of diverse students, the Graduate Teaching Assistants have adopted their own strategies and methods for teaching the basic course. These include recognizing and addressing each student's abilities and experiences, allowing students to adapt assignments to these abilities and experiences, and providing a comfortable and collaborative environment in which to practice their skills. The co-researchers identified a number of elements in the course described by Foss that they believe would best serve students with diverse skills and experiences in an advanced public speaking course at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. We can build upon lived experiences of those individuals who are currently teaching the basic public speaking course to create an advanced public speaking course that supports the ideals held up by both the discipline of Communication and the University of Alaska Fairbanks, to acknowledge and celebrate diversity.

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APPENDIX A:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which Graduate Teaching Assistants identify and respond to the unique student demographic in the basic public speaking course (COMM 141X) at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. You are being asked to spend approximately one hour of your time sharing your experience with diverse student needs, abilities, and learning styles and an additional hour discussing elements of curriculum in a focus group setting.

Ethical guidelines including privacy and confidentiality will be strictly followed in this study. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Your name will not be used in any report or paper. There are no apparent risks to participants involved in the research process. The interview will be audio recorded for transcription and qualitative analysis. The audio tape will be destroyed directly after the transcription process.

By signing this form you agree to participate in this study and understand the ethical guidelines listed above.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

Thank you for your participation in this research project. A copy of the research results will be mailed to you at your request. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at my office:

Researcher:	Shannon Sehnert
Office Phone:	474-1876
E-mail:	ftses@uaf.edu
Office:	Rm. 401, Department of Communication University of Alaska Fairbanks

Sincerely,

Shannon Sehnert, Graduate Student

University of Alaska Fairbanks, Department of Communication